

PLEADING AND ENCOURAGEMENT NO. 1795

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 17, 1884,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD:
and not that he should return from his ways, and live?”
Ezekiel 18:23.*

*“For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD:
wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”
Ezekiel 18:32.*

*“As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that
the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your
evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”
Ezekiel 33:11.*

SIN having a thorough possession of the human heart, entrenches itself within the soul, as one who has taken a stronghold speedily attends to the repairing of the breaches, and the strengthening of the walls, lest haply he should be dislodged. Among the most subtle devices of sin to keep the soul under its power, and prevent the man's turning to God, is the slandering of the Most High by misrepresenting His character. As dust blinds the eye, so sin does prevent the sinner from seeing God aright. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,” but the wicked only see what they think to be God, and that, alas, is an image as unlike God as possible! They say, for instance, that God is unmerciful, whereas He delights in mercy. The unfaithful servant in the parable was quite sure about it, and said most positively, “I knew that thou wast an austere man,” whereas the nature of God is as opposite to overbearing and exaction as light is from darkness.

When men once get this false idea of God into their minds they become hardened in heart, believing that it is useless to turn to God, they go on in their sin with greater determination. Either they conceive that God is implacable, or that He is indifferent to human prayers, or that if He should hear them yet He is not in the least likely to grant a favorable answer. Men darkly dream that God will not attend to the guilty and the miserable when they cry to Him, that their prayers are not good enough for Him, that He expects so much from His creatures that they cannot even pray so as to please Him, that, in fact, He seeks a quarrel against us, and is a taskmaster who will grind all He can out of us.

Being themselves slow to forgive, they judge it to be highly unlikely that the Lord will pardon such sins as theirs. As they will not smile on the poor or the fallen, they conceive that the Lord will never receive unworthy ones into His favor. Thus they belie the Host High, they make Him who is the best of Kings to be a tyrant, and Him who is the dearest of friends they regard as an enemy, and Him whose very name is love they look upon as the embodiment of hate.

This is one of Satan's most mischievous devices to prevent repentance. As in the old times of plague they fastened up the house door, and marked a red cross upon it, and thus the inhabitants of that dwelling were sealed unto death, even so the devil writes upon the man's door the words, “no hope,” and then the sick soul determines to die, and refuses admission to the Physician. No man sins more unreservedly than he who sins in desperation, believing that there is no pardon for him from God. An assault where the watchword is “No quarter” usually provokes a terrible defense. The pirate who is

hopeless of pardon becomes reckless in his deeds of blood. Many a burglar in the old time actually went on to murder without remorse, because he thought he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. When a man believes that there is no hope for him in the right way, he determines that he will get what he can out of the wrong way, and if he cannot please God, he will, at least, please himself. If he must go to hell, he will be as merry as he can on the road, and as he puts it, he will “die game.”

All this comes of a mistaken view of God. Do you not see the likeness between sin and falsehood? They are twin brothers. Holiness is truth, but sin is a lie, and the mother of lies. Sin brings forth falsehood, and then falsehood nourishes sin. Especially in this fashion does falsehood maintain sin, by calumniating the God of love. He is a God ready to pardon, and by no means hard to be moved to forgiveness, why do men stand off from confessing their wrong, and finding mercy? He is not a God who takes pleasure in the miseries of men, why do they think so ill of Him? His ear is not dull to the cry of sorrow; His heart is not slow to compassionate distress, on the contrary, He waits to be gracious, “His mercy endureth forever,” He delights in mercy, why will men run from Him? God is love immeasurable, love constant, boundless, endless.

***“Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”***

Part of our business as ministers of Christ is to bear witness to the loving-kindness of the Lord against the falsehood with which sin dishonors His goodness. I desire to do so this morning, and to do it in right down earnest, in the hope that those of you who are convinced of sin may this day be able to rest in the mercy of God—even that exceeding mercy which He has revealed in Jesus Christ, His Son.

I have been very much struck with several letters which I have received this week from deeply wounded souls. God is at work among us with the sword of conviction. I have felt a great degree of joy in receiving these letters, painful as they are to their writers, they are very hopeful to me. I am sorry that any persons should be near despair, and should continue in that condition, but anything is better than indifference. I am not sorry to see souls shut up in the prison of the law, for I hope they will soon come out of the prison house into the full liberty of faith in Christ.

I must confess my preference for these old-fashioned forms of conviction, it is my judgment that they produce better and more stable believers than the modern superficial methods. I am glad to see the Holy Spirit overturning, throwing down, digging out the foundations, and making you like cleared ground that He may build upon you temples for His praise. How earnestly do I pray that the Lord may make of these convinced ones champions for the doctrines of free grace, comforters for His mourners, and consecrated servants of His kingdom! I look for large harvests from this deep subsoil ploughing. The Lord grant it, for His name’s sake!

I can see in several who have written to me that their main idea is erroneous, that they have fallen into a wrong notion about God, they do not conceive of Him as the good and gracious God which He really is. This error I am eager to correct. Listen to me, you mourners. I desire to tell you nothing but the sober truth. God forbid that I should misrepresent God for your comfort! Job asked his friends, “Will ye talk deceitfully for God?” and my answer to that question is—“Never.” I would not utter what I believed to be falsehood concerning the Lord, even though the evil one offered me the bait of saving all mankind thereby.

I have noticed in certain Revival Meetings a wretched lowering of the truth upon many points in order to afford encouragement to men, but all such sophistry ends in utter failure. Comfort based upon the suppression of truth is worse than useless. Lasting consolation must come to sinners from the sure truth of God, or else in the day when they most want it their hopes will depart from them, as the giving up of the ghost. I will therefore speak to you the truth in its simplicity concerning the blessed God, whose servant I am. I beseech you no longer to persevere in your slander of His infinite love.

Oh, you that feel your sin, and dare not put your trust in your forgiving God, I pray you to learn of Him, and know Him aright, for then shall that text be fulfilled in you—"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." May the Holy Spirit come now in all His brightness, that you may see God in His own light! As for me, I feel my duty to be one in which nothing can avail me but that same Spirit. Chrysostom used to wonder that any minister could be saved, seeing our responsibilities are so great, I am entirely of his mind. Pray for me that I may be faithful to men's souls.

Notice, that in each one of my texts the Lord declares that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in each following passage the statement is stronger. The Lord puts it first as a matter of *question*. As if He was surprised that such a thing should be laid to His door, He appeals to man's own reason, and asks, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" saith the Lord GOD: "and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"

Oh, souls, can you really think that God desires your damnation? Can you be so demented as soberly to believe such a calumny? Will such a theory hold water for a single minute? After all the goodness of God to multitudes of rebellious men, can you allow such a dark thought to linger near your mind, that God can have pleasure in men's being sinners, and ultimately destroying themselves by their iniquities? Your own common sense must teach you that the good God is grieved to see men sin, that He would be glad to see men of a better mind, and that it is sad work to Him to punish the finally obstinate and impenitent. He cries most plaintively "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." He puts it here as a question of wonderment, that men should so grossly malign Him as to think that the God of love could have any pleasure in men's perishing by their sins.

But then, in the next place, in our second text, God makes a *positive assertion*. Knowing the human heart, He foresaw that a question would not be enough to end this matter, for man would say, "He only asked the question, but He did not give a plain and positive statement to the contrary." He gives us that clear assurance in our second text, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live." When the Lord speaks He is to be believed, for He is God that cannot lie.

We know that this speech of His is authentic, it comes to us by an inspired prophet, concerning whose call by God we entertain no doubt whatever. Let us, then, believe it heartily. If I were to state this as my own opinion, you might do as you please about believing it, but since God says this, then we claim of you all, as God's creatures, that you believe your Creator, and that this statement be never questioned again. "Where the word of a king is, there is power"—power, I trust, to silence all further debate upon the willingness of God to save.

But still, as if to end forever the strange and ghastly supposition that God takes delight in human destruction, my third text seals the truth with the *solemn oath* of the Eternal. He lifts His hand to heaven, and swears, and because He can swear by no greater, He swears by Himself—not by His temple, nor by His throne therein, nor by His angels, nor by anything outside of Himself, but He swears by His own life. JEHOVAH that lives forever and ever says, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." The man who dares to doubt the oath of God will be guilty of an arrogant presumption which I would not like to impute to one of you.

Shall God be perjured? I tremble at having even suggested such a thing, and yet if you do not believe the Lord's own oath you will not only have made Him a liar, but you will have denied the value of His oath when He swears by His own life. What He thus affirms must be true, let us bow before it, and never entertain a doubt about it. Most miserable of all men that breathe must they be who will dare to attack the veracity of God, when God to confirm their confidence does put Himself upon an oath. Let us hear the voice of the Lord in its majesty, like a peal of distant thunder—"As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live."

I invite your earnest consideration of this utterance thus given in the form of a question, an assertion, and a solemn oath.

I. And I notice, first, the assertion that GOD FINDS NO PLEASURE IN A SINNER'S DEATH.

Really, I feel ashamed to have to answer the cruel libel which is here suggested, yet it is the English of many a man's doubts. He dares not come to God and trust Him because he darkly dreams that God is a terrible Being who does not wish to save him, who is unwilling to forgive him, unwilling to receive him into His favor. He suspects that God finds some kind of terrible delight in a soul's damnation. That cannot be. I need not disprove the falsehood. God swears to the contrary, and the falsehood vanishes like smoke. I will only bring forward certain evidence by which you who are still under the deadly influence of the falsehood may be delivered.

First, *consider the great paucity of God's judgments among the sons of men.* There are people who are always talking of judgments, but they are in error. If a theater is burnt down, or if a boat is upset on the Sabbath, they cry, "Behold a judgment!" Yet churches and meeting houses are burned, and missionaries are drowned when upon the Lord's own business. It is wrong to set down everything that happens as a judgment, for in so doing you will fall into the error of Job's friends, and condemn the innocent.

The fact is there are but few acts of divine providence to individuals which can definitely be declared to be judgments. There are such things, but they are wonderfully rare in this life, considering the way in which the Lord is daily provoked by presumption and blasphemy. It was a judgment when Pharaoh's hosts were drowned in the Red Sea, that was a judgment when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram went down alive into the pit. There were judgments later on in the church of God when Ananias and Sapphira fell dead for lying against the Holy Ghost, and when Elymas the sorcerer was blinded for opposing Paul. Still, these are few, and in later days the authentic instances are equally rare.

Does not the Lord Himself say that "judgment is His strange work"? Among His own people there is a constant judgment of fatherly discipline, but the outer world is left to the gentle *regime* of mercy. This is the age of patience and long-suffering. If God had taken any pleasure in the death of the wicked, some of you who are now present would long ago have gone down to hell, but He has not dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. If God were constantly dealing out judgment for lying, how many that are now here would by this time have received their portion in the burning lake! If judgments for Sabbath-breaking had been commonly dealt out, this city of London would have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. But God reserves His wrath till the day of wrath, for a while He winks at man's obstinacy, for this is not the place of judgment, but of forbearance and hope. The fewness of visible deeds of judgment upon ungodly men in this life proves that God takes no delight in them.

And then, secondly, *the length of God's long-suffering before the Day of Judgment itself comes* proves how He wills not the death of men. The Lord spares many guilty men throughout three-score years and ten, bearing with their ill-manners in a way which ought to excite our loving gratitude. Youthful folly is succeeded by manhood's deliberate fault, and that, by the persistence of mature years, and yet the Lord remains patient!

Some of you have rejected Christ after having heard the Gospel for many years, you have stifled your conscience when it has cried against you, and you have done despite to the Spirit of God. You have rebelled against the light, and have committed greater and yet greater sin, but God has not cut you down. If He had found pleasure in your death, would He have suffered you to live so long? You have cumbered the ground, not two or three years, as the barren fig tree did, but two or three scores of years you have stood fruitless in the vineyard of God, and yet He spares you!

Some have gone beyond all this, for they have provoked God by their open unbelief, and by their abominable speeches against Himself, His Son, and His people. They have tried to thrust their finger into the eye of God, they have spit in the face of the Well-beloved, and persecuted Him in the person of His people. Yet the Lord has not killed them out of hand, as He might justly have done. Have you not heard His sword stirring in its scabbard? It would have leaped forth from its sheath if mercy had not thrust it back, and pleaded, "O thou sword of the Lord, rest and be quiet!" It is only because His

compassions fail not that you are favored with the loving invitations of the Gospel. Only because of His infinite patience does grace still wrestle with human sin and unbelief. Let us each one cry—

*“Lord, and am I yet alive,
Not in torments, not in hell!
Still doth Thy good Spirit strive—
With the chief of sinners dwell?
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!”*

Furthermore, remember *the perfection of the character of God as the moral Ruler of the Universe*. He is the Judge of all, and He must do right. Now, if a judge upon the bench were known to take delight in the punishment of offenders, he ought to be removed at once, for it would be clear that he was thoroughly unfit for his office. A man, who would take pleasure in hanging, or imprisoning, would be of the foul breed of Judge Jeffreys, and other monsters, from whom I trust our bench is forever purged. But if I heard it said that a judge never pronounced the sentence of death without tears, that when he came home from the court, and remembered that some had been banished for life by the sentences which he had been bound to deliver, he sat in a moody, unhappy state all the evening, I should say, “Yes, that is the kind of person to be a judge.”

Aversion to punishment is necessary to justice in a judge. Such a one is God, who takes no pleasure either in sin, or in the punishment which is the consequence of sin, He hates both sin and its consequence, and only comes at last to heavy blows with men when everything else has failed. When the sinner must be condemned, or else the foundations of society would be out of course, then He delivers the terrible sentence, but even then it is with unfeigned reluctance, and He cries, “How can I give you up?”

The Great Judge of all seems to descend from the glory of His judgment seat, and show His more familiar face to you in the text, as in effect He cries, “I have judged, and I have condemned, and I have punished; but as I live, I find no pleasure in all this, My pleasure comes when men turn unto Me and live.”

If any further thoughts were necessary to correct your misbelief, I would mention *the graciousness of His work in saving those who turn from their evil ways*. The care which the Most High has taken to produce repentance, the alacrity with which He accepts it, and the abounding love manifested to returning prodigals, are all evidences indisputable that God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in their salvation.

To prevent the death of the wicked the Lord devised a plan of salvation before all worlds, and those who accept that plan find that the Lord has provided for them a Substitute in the person of His own dear Son, who is indeed His own self, and that in His person God Himself has borne the penalty due to sin, that thus the law might be solemnly honored, and the divine justice vindicated. The Lord has gone up to the tree, and bled His life away thereon, that God might be just and yet the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus, does not this prove His delight in salvation?

The Holy Spirit comes on purpose to renew the heart, and take the stone away from it, that men may become tender and penitent—does not this show that God delights to save? The whole resources of the Godhead go forth with spontaneous delight for the salvation of those who turn from their sin, yea, they go forth before men turn, to turn them that they may be turned. God is even found of them that sought Him not, and He sends His grace to those who cried not after it. As if God were indignant that such a charge should be laid against Him that He delights in the death of any, He preferred to die Himself upon the tree rather than let a world of sinners sink to hell.

To prove the desire of God that men should live, His Son abode for thirty years and more on this poor earth as a man among men, and His Holy Spirit has dwelt in men for all these centuries, bearing all the provocations of an erring and ungrateful people. God has proved Himself in multitudes of ways to be

not the Destroyer, but the Preserver of men. “He that is our God is the God of salvation.” “Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.”

Thus would I try to vindicate the ways of God to men. When men are to be tried for their lives, if their friends are able to do so, they come to them in prison, and say, “It is a very hopeful thing for you that it is not Judge So-and-So, who is terribly severe, you are to be tried before the kindest man on the bench.” Many a prisoner has plucked up courage at such news, and oh, poor sinner, you who dare not trust God, let me chide you into hope by reminding you that Love sits embodied on the throne of judgment this day, and that He who must and will condemn you, if you turn not from your sins, nevertheless will find no pleasure in that condemnation, but will be loath to make bare the axe of execution. Will you not turn to Him and live? Do not His compassions beckon you to make a full surrender, and find grace in His sight?

II. But now, secondly, GOD FINDS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT THAT MEN MUST TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, OR DIE.

“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live.” It is one or the other, turn or burn. God, with all His love to men, cannot discover any third course, men cannot keep their sins and yet be saved. The sin must die or the sinner must die.

Be it known to you, first, that when God proclaims mercy to men upon this condition, that, they turn from their ways, *this proclamation is issued out of pure grace*. As a matter of bare right, repentance does not bring mercy with it. Does a murderer receive pardon because he regrets his deed? Does a thief escape from prison because at last he comes to be sorry that he was not honest? Repentance makes no available amends for the evil which is done, the evil still remains, and the punishment must be executed. It is of grace, then, that I am permitted to say, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways.” It is because at the back of it there is a great sacrifice, it is through an all-sufficient atonement that repentance becomes acceptable.

The Son of God has bled and died, and made expiation for sin, and now He is exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins. Today the word of the Lord is, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This is not according to the law, which gives no space for repentance, but it is a pure matter of grace. God saves you, not because of any merit in your turning, but because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He has decreed to save all who turn from the paths of evil.

Note, next, that *if there is no repentance men must be punished, for on any other theory there is an end of moral government*. The worst thing that could happen to a world of men would be for God to say, “I retract My law, I will neither reward virtue, nor punish iniquity, do as you like.” Then the earth would be a hell indeed. The greatest enemy to civil government among men is the man who preaches universal salvation—salvation apart from a change of heart and life. Such teachers are a danger to national order, they remove the foundation of the commonwealth. They practically say, “Do just as you like, it may make a slight difference to you for a little while, but it will soon be over, and villains and saints will share an equal heaven.”

Such talk is damnable! I can say no less. If there is to be a government at all, it is necessary that sin should not go unpunished, leniency to the dishonest is cruelty to those whom they injure. To save the murderer is to kill the innocent. It were an evil day for heaven and earth if it could once be proven that God would reward the depraved in the same way as the sanctified, then would the foundation be removed, and what would the righteous do? A God who was not just would be a poor Ruler of the universe.

Yes, my hearers, sin must be punished, you must turn from it or die, because *sin is its own punishment*. When we talk to you of the fire that never can be quenched, and the worm that dies not, we are supposed to mean those literal things, but indeed these are figures, figures representing something more terrible than themselves, the fire is the burning of a furious rebellion in the soul, and the worm is the torture of a never-dying conscience. Sin is hell.

Within the heart of disobedience there lies a world of misery. God has so constituted us, and rightly so, that we cannot long be evil and happy, we must, if we go wrong, ultimately become wretched, and the more wrong we are, and the longer we continue in that wrong, the more assuredly are we heaping up sorrow for ourselves throughout eternity. Holiness and right produce happiness, but iniquity and wrong must, by a necessity of nature which never can be changed, produce tribulation and anguish. It must be so. Even the omnipotence of God cannot make an impenitent sinner happy. You must turn from sin, or turn to misery, you must either renounce your sins, or else renounce all hope of a blissful eternity. You cannot be married to Christ and heaven until you are divorced from sin and self.

I believe that *every man's conscience bears witness to this* if it is at all honest. There are consciences of a very curious kind about at this time—abortions, and not true consciences at all. I find men deliberately acting upon crooked policy, and yet they talk of truth and holiness. Yet every conscience that is not drunken with the mixed wine of pride and unbelief, will tell a man that when he does evil he cannot expect to be approved, that if he neglects to do good he cannot expect to have the same reward as if he had done the good—that, in fact, there must be, in the nature of things, a penalty attached to crime. Conscience says as much as that, and now God Himself, who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, puts it to you—you must repent or perish. If you go on in your evil ways, you must be lost. There must be a turning from sin, or the Most High God can never look upon you with favor. Do you hear this? Oh, that you would let it sink into your heart, and work repentance in you!

III. This leads me on to the third point, which is a joyful one, GOD FINDS PLEASURE IN MEN'S TURNING FROM SIN.

Read the passage again—"As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." Among the highest of the divine joys is the pleasure of seeing a sinner turn from evil. God delights in those first thoughts which men have towards Himself, when being careless heretofore they on a sudden begin to reflect upon their ways, and consider their condition before God. He looks with pleasure upon you who have aforetime been wild and thoughtless, who at last meditate upon Eternity, and weigh the future of sin and judgment.

When you listen to that inviting word, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near," God is pleased to observe your attention. When you begin to feel, "I am sorry for my sin, oh, that I had never committed it!" He hears your sigh. When your heart is sick of sin, when you loathe all evil, and feel that though you cannot get away from it, yet you would if you could, then He looks down on you with pitying eyes. When there is a new will springing up in your heart, by His good grace—a will to obey and believe, then also the Father smiles.

When He hears within you a moaning and a sighing after the Father's house and the Father's bosom, you cannot see Him, but He is behind the wall listening to you. His hand is secretly putting your tears into His bottle, and His heart is feeling compassion for you. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Mark that last character, the man has only a little hope, but the Lord takes pleasure in him. When yet the good work is only in the twilight, God is as pleased with it as watchmen are pleased with the first beams of morning light, ay, He is more glad than they that watch for the morning.

When at last you come to prayer, and begin to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," God is well pleased, for here He sees clear signs that you are coming to yourself and to Him. His Spirit says, "Behold, he prayeth!" and He takes this as a token for good. When you unfeignedly forsake sin God sees you do it, and He is so glad that His holy angels spy out His joy.

I am sure that God watches the struggles of those who endeavor to escape from old habits and evil ways. When you try to conquer vile thoughts, when at the end of the day you sit down and cry over the day's failures because you did not get as well through the day as you hoped to do, the Lord observes your desires and your lamentations. Just as a mother tenderly watches her child when it begins to walk, and smiles as she sees it toddling from chair to chair, and puts out her finger to help it, so does God take pleasure in your early attempts after holiness, your longing to overcome sin, your sighings and cryings

to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. God says, “I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms,” and in the same way He is teaching you.

I will tell you what pleases Him most of all, and that is when you come to His dear Son, and say, “Lord, something tells me that there is no hope for me, but I do not believe that voice. I read in Your Word that You will cast out none that come unto You, and lo, I come! I am the biggest sinner that ever did come, but Lord, I believe Your promise, I am as unworthy as the devil himself, but Lord, You do not ask for worthiness, but only for child-like confidence. Cast me not away—I rest in You.” “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” but it gives God a divine pleasure to see the first grain of mustard seed of faith in a poor, turning sinner’s heart.

Oh, I wish you would think of this, you that keep on condemning yourselves! When you write me those letters, full of self-condemnation, you please *me*, and if you please me, I am sure you much more please God, who is so much more tender than ever I can be, though I would fain try and humbly imitate Him. How I wish I could bring you to trust my Lord this morning, and end those cruel doubts and fears!

*“Artful doubts and reasonings be
Nailed with Jesus to the tree.”*

God’s great convincing argument is His dying, bleeding Son. Oh, you chief of sinners, turn to Him, and God will have pleasure in your turning! Do you not know that all these thoughts towards Him are breathed into you by His Spirit? All those regrets for sin, those desires after holiness, and especially those trustings in Christ, those hopings in His mercy, are all His work, they would never have been found in your soul if the Spirit had not put them there.

If I saw a fair flower growing on a dunghill, I should conclude that a gardener had been there some day or other, and had cast seed upon the heap. And when I see your soul commencing to pray, and hope, and trust, I say to myself, “God is there. The Holy Spirit has been at work there, or else there would not have been even that feeble trusting, and that faint hoping.” Wherefore be of good courage, you are drawing near to a gracious God.

During the rest of your life, when you go on fighting with sin, and when you consecrate yourself to Jesus, when you wash your Savior’s feet with your tears, and wipe them with the hairs of your head with the Magdalene, or when you break your alabaster box of myrrh, and pour it on the Master’s head with Mary, the Lord has great pleasure in you for Jesus’ sake. He takes no pleasure in the groans and cries of hell, but in the repentance of sinners He has joy. The fires of Gehenna give Him no delight, but penitents smiting on their breasts, and believers beholding Christ with tearful eyes, are a royal spectacle to Him. It must be so, He swears it, and it must be true. Cease your quibbling, and believe unto eternal life.

IV. Lastly, since He has pleasure in men’s turning to Him, GOD THEREFORE EXHORTS TO IT, AND ADDS AN ARGUMENT.

“Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” He perceives His poor creature standing with his back to Him, looking to idols, looking to sinful pleasures, looking towards the city of destruction, and what does God say to him? He says, “Turn!” It is a very plain direction, is it not? “Turn,” or “Right about face!” That is all. “I thought,” says one, “I was to feel so much anguish and so much agony.” I should not wonder if you do feel it, but all that God says is, “Turn.” You now face the wrong way, “Turn,” and face the right way. That turning is true repentance. A changed life is of the essence of repentance, and that must spring from a changed heart, from a changed desire, from a changed will. God says, “Turn ye.” Oh, that you would hear and obey!

Notice how He puts it in the present tense—“Turn ye, turn ye,” not tomorrow, but now. Nobody will be saved tomorrow, all who are saved, are saved today. “Now is the accepted time.” “Turn ye.” Oh, by the infinite mercy of God, who will enable you to turn, I do pray you turn from every evil, from every self-confidence, unto God. No turning but turning to God is worth having. If the Lord turn you, you will turn to Himself, and to confidence alone in Him, and to His service and His fear.

“Turn ye, turn ye.” See, the Lord puts it twice. He must mean your good by these repeated directions. Suppose my man servant was crossing yonder river, and I saw that he would soon be out of his depth, and so in great danger, suppose I cried out to him, “Stop! Stop! If you go another inch you will drown. Turn back! Turn back!” Will anybody dare to say, “Mr. Spurgeon would feel pleasure if that man were drowned”? It would be a cruel cut. What a liar the man must be who would hint such a thing when I am urging my servant to turn and save his life!

Would God plead with us to escape unless He honestly desired that we should escape? I believe not. Every sinner may be sure that God takes no pleasure in his death when He pleads with him in these unrivalled words, “Turn ye, turn ye; why will you die?” There is what the old divines used to call an ingemination, an inward groaning, a reduplication of pleading in these words, “Turn ye, turn ye.” He pleads each time with more of emphasis. Will you not hear?

Then He finishes up with asking men to find a reason why they should die. There ought to be a weighty reason to induce a man to die. “Why will ye die?” This is an unanswerable question in reference to death eternal. Is there anything to be desired in eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of His power? Can there be any gain in losing your own soul? Can there be any profit in going away into everlasting punishment? Can there possibly be anything to be wished for and desired in being cast into hell, where their worm dies not, and their fire is not quenched.

O souls, be not unreasonable! Do not neglect this great salvation. It must be the most awful thing in all the world to die in your sins, why do you choose it? Do you desire shipwreck? Why hug that rocky shore, and tempt destruction? Will you eat the poisoned dainties of sin because they are sugared with a little present pleasure? In the end, the gall of bitterness will fill your heart. I am no flatterer, I dare not be, for I love you, and would persuade you to turn unto the Lord.

There is a flower which always turns to the sun, oh, that you would in the same manner turn to God! Why turn away from Him? “WHY?” is a little word, but how much it takes to answer its demands! WHY do you continue in sin? WHY do you refuse to believe your Savior? WHY will you provoke God? WHY will you die? Turn round and say, “Oh, God, I cannot bear to perish everlastingly, and therefore I cannot endure to live in sin. May Your rich grace help me!”

Oh, that you would trust in the Lord Jesus! Repose in Him, and in His finished work, and all is well. Did I hear you say, “I will pray about it”? Better trust at once. Pray as much as you like after you have trusted, but what is the good of unbelieving prayers? “I will talk with a godly man after the service.” I charge you first trust in Jesus. Go home alone, trusting in Jesus. “I should like to go into the inquiry room.” I dare say you would, but we are not willing to pander to popular superstition. We fear that in those rooms men are warmed into a fictitious confidence. Very few of the supposed converts of inquiry rooms turn out well. Go to your God at once, even where you now are. Cast yourself on Christ, now, at once, ere you stir an inch! In God’s name I charge you, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 33

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—912, 558, 202

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